

This Week in Congress

May 31, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

Honoring Those We've Lost this Memorial Day

Yesterday we observed Memorial Day across our country, a day set aside to remember those we've lost. In addition to remembering our friends and loved ones, Memorial Day also is a time to honor the men and women of the armed forces, killed in the line of duty. This spring has been a particularly difficult time for our state, as we mourn the loss of four Kansas soldiers in the last month.

This week, we learned that Army Sergeant Benjamin Morton, of Wright, died May 22 in Mosul, Iraq, when his patrol encountered enemy fire. Marine Sergeant Christopher Perez, of Hutchinson, died the next day, May 23, during combat operations in Ramadi, Iraq. Earlier in the month, on May 1, it was announced that Kansas Army National Guard Specialist Derrick Lutters of Goodland was killed when a suicide bomber in Baghdad, Iraq attacked his vehicle. Also this spring, First Sergeant Timmy J. Millsap, of Salina, died April 25 in Taji, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was based out of Fort Riley. In total, forty-nine Fort Riley soldiers have been killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I offer my deepest sympathies to the Perez, Morton, Lutters and Millsap families for their loss and join them in remembering their loved ones this Memorial Day. On Memorial Day, we honor those who put their lives at risk for the good of their country. It is remarkable that, from the Revolutionary War to today, we have been blessed with men and women willing to sacrifice God's gift of life. We are thankful that individuals of each generation have been willing to serve America, and that they would risk everything to allow their children and grandchildren the opportunity to live in freedom.

Yesterday, I attended Memorial Day services at the American Legion in Hays to honor our fallen soldiers. Later in the day, in my hometown of Plainville, I joined my parents for a service at the Plainville Cemetery. My father, Ray, is a veteran of World War II.

House Passes Funding for Kansas Troops, Veterans

This week, the House passed two measures supporting our nation's troops and veterans who have so honorably served our country, both in the past and today. The National Defense Authorization Act for 2006 authorizes funding for protecting our service members fighting the War on Terrorism and works to better compensate soldiers and their families for their service and sacrifice. This legislation, which serves as a blueprint for our nation's military spending in 2006, provides a 3.1 percent pay raise for members of the armed forces, increases the maximum amount of hardship pay from \$300 to \$750 per month, and eliminates Basic Allowance for Housing Type II so that rates for reservists mobilized over 30 days, will be the same as those in active duty. In addition, this legislation honors service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice by permanently increasing the payment to families who have lost a loved one in battle from \$12,000 to \$100,000.

The House this week also passed 2006 funding legislation for veterans. The legislation provides a record level of funding for veterans' medical care and benefits, by increasing funding for veterans medical services by 9 percent from last year and 18 percent over the last two years. In addition, the phase-in for full concurrent receipt of veterans disability compensation and military retired pay is accelerated to October 1, 2009 - over four years earlier than previously planned. It does not include an increase in co-payments for prescription drugs, as some have suggested.

Also this week, the House passed funding for the construction of improvements at Fort Riley. \$5.5 million will be used to enhance Fort Riley's ability to train and deploy troops by expanding a Deployment Facility Ramp and \$17.5 million will go towards a Digital Multipurpose Training Range.

Meeting with Ag Secretary Johanns and New Trade Ambassador Portman

On Wednesday, the House Agriculture Committee met with Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and the recently instated U.S. Trade Representative, Rob Portman, to discuss issues related to agriculture trade, multilateral trade negotiations and the United States-Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA). This proposed trade agreement, which must be approved by Congress, promotes trade between the U.S. and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. President Bush has been strongly advocating the potential benefits of DR-CAFTA and is encouraging members of the House and Senate to vote for the measure when it comes up, later this summer.

Secretary Johanns and Ambassador Portman emphasized to members of the Agriculture Committee that DR-CAFTA could create important new export opportunities for U.S. farmers, ranchers and processors. However, opponents to DR-CAFTA believe that the benefits are over-exaggerated and that it could cost Americans jobs. Based on U.S. trade agreement history, and our growing trade deficit, I have concerns about this legislation. However, I look forward to the upcoming debate in Congress.

Also in agriculture, the deadline for Kansas farmers to sign-up for the USDA's 2005 crop direct and counter-cyclical payment program is June 1. The USDA will accept late-filed DCP applications through September 30, but a \$100 late fee will apply. Producers should visit their local Farm Service Agency offices for more information or visit the online sign-up program at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/egov/edcp_default.htm

Ensuring Fairness for Our Troops

This week, the House passed two legislative measures I sponsored to ensure that service members defending our country are not unfairly penalized for answering the call to duty. H.R. 1499, the Heroes Earned Retirement Opportunities (HERO) Act, allows soldiers serving overseas to fully participate in retirement investment opportunities. Under current IRS rules, troops serving in combat zones are not allowed to contribute their hazard pay toward their Individual Retirement Accounts. This legislation adjusts the federal tax code to permit soldiers to use their combat pay to make those contributions.

Legislation was also passed to block unfair increases to health insurance premiums for Guard and Reservists who return from active duty and restore their civilian policies. Members of the Reserve component often switch to health care through the Department of Defense while they are called up to active duty. H.R. 2046, the Service Members' Health Insurance Protection Act, guarantees that these soldiers can return to their old policies without being singled out for rate increases.

It is my hope that the Senate will now take quick action to support these measures. Our servicemen and women are making great sacrifices, leaving their families and the comforts of home to serve our country. It is only fair that they receive the same opportunities we all enjoy.

Big First Listening Tour Continues During District Work Period

Congress is out of session the first week of June for the Memorial Day district work period. These weeks are worked into the Congressional voting schedule to allow members to spend additional time in their districts. This week, I will be holding town hall meetings across the district as part of my 69-county Big First Listening Tour.

This past Saturday, I met with Rice County residents in Lyons. Following the town hall meeting in Lyons, I joined Little River-area residents for their annual Memorial Day parade. The day's festivities celebrated Little River's 125th birthday.

Today I'll be in Reno County, at the Dillon Nature Center in Hutchinson. For a full list of times and dates when I'll be in your county, visit here: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ks01_moran/041105TheTour.html

In the Office

Several Kansas accountants were in the office this week, representing the Kansas Society of CPA's. In to discuss issues pertaining to tax reform, financial literacy and Social Security were Gary Schlappe of Garden City, Phil Watson of Hutchinson, Kyle Hawk of McPherson, Bob Crawford of Wichita, T.C. Anderson of Topeka and Jim Clark of Lawrence. I also met with several Manhattan-area residents in as part of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce to discuss transportation, aviation and health care. Britt Gates of Anthony was in from the Zoie Foundation to discuss child safety concerning power windows. I also had the opportunity to visit with Kim Dahlsten of McPherson and Edie Dahlsten of Lindsborg.

In the office this week for a tour of the Capitol building were State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins, her husband, Scott and their children, Hayley and Hayden of Topeka. Also in were Ben and Betsy Wearing with their three sons, James, Bobby, and Christopher, as well as Scott Darling, all of Salina.

Courtney and Karen Light of Rolla were in with their children, Kelsey and Tyler as were Owen and Donna Zinke of Seneca and their children, Alicia, Michael and Eric. Mark and Stacey Lott of Lindsborg were in with their son Tanner, as were Phil and Erin Kaberline of Overland Park, Ryan and Erin Wichman of Silver Lake, Myndee Reed of Hutchinson and her children, Gunner and Bryce, as well as Myndee's mother, Eileen Birdsong of Topeka. Also in, all from McPherson, were Verna French and Heath and Lisa Starr.

Very truly yours,

Jerry